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Washington

How to Make Things Worse Than They Really Are

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BY JAMES RESTON

WASHINGTON, Oct. 6—John McCone, the head man at the Central Intelligence Agency, is discovering in Vietnam, as his predecessor, Allen Dulles, did in Cuba, that running a secret service for a big, gabby country is a very dicy business.

He is now accused publicly of differing with his Government's policy in Saigon, which he denies, and he takes the whole controversy so seriously that he has convinced himself that there is a conspiracy inside the Government and in the press to destroy his agency.

This is a serious thing if true, for the cold war is in part a war of insurgency and counter-insurgency, and in such a war an effective secret service is increasingly important. But so far as can be determined here, there is no evidence of any conspiracy either by or against the C.I.A. in Vietnam.

An Old Dispute

There is a jurisdictional dispute between the C.I.A. and the State and Defense Departments. There always has been. State has always been afraid C.I.A. would not restrict itself to the gathering of intelligence but would go beyond that to interpret their intelligence in such a way as to influence or make policy.

Similarly, the Defense Department has always been afraid the C.I.A. would get into the field of actual operations, as it did in Cuba. Thus, State and Defense, jealous of their policy and operations functions, respectively, have always been suspicious of C.I.A. and prone to complain to the press whenever they think they see evidence of encroachment.

These feelings were savagely pressed in the first Cuban crisis. They have been heard again about Vietnam, but the analogy with Cuba is misleading.

No doubt McCone and his head man in Saigon, John H. Richardson, who has now been called home, have strong views about both policy and operations in Vietnam. It would be surprising if they didn't.

The C.I.A. was deeply involved in Vietnam long before the 14,000 U.S. troops were sent there. The C.I.A. helped train the Vietnamese army. And they were already close to President Diem and his brother, Ngo Dinh Nhu, before President Kennedy made his decision that a major counter-insurgency effort should be launched in Vietnam.

temples were raided, starting the present crisis, the C.I.A., State and Defense officials were not only operating in Saigon but were deeply involved emotionally, and had different views about how the U.S. should react to the raids.

The differing views, however, did not always follow the party line of the three government agencies. Some men in State thought a major effort should be made to force changes in the policies and personnel of the Diem Government. Others thought that while such changes were desirable, they could not be forced without weakening the war effort. But these conflicting views existed within all three agencies, including the C.I.A. in Saigon, and President Kennedy himself first supported the first line and then the second.

This was not, then, an Alfred Hitchcock spectacular involving the C.I.A. vs. the Rest. It was an honest difference over whether a purge of the Diem Government was possible and whether such a purge would or would not help the war effort.

McCone's Sensitivity

The State Department, for example, against the judgment of some of its own people but with the support of most of its top officials, issued a private directive in support of trying to force a change in the Diem Government.

It did not check this out with C.I.A. to see whether C.I.A.'s intelligence would show that such a purge could be forced. Nor did it tell the Defense Department about the directive. So C.I.A. and Defense, which in general were not for trying the purge, were not amused.

What is surprising about all this is that McCone should be so surprised and tender about the criticism and the belated efforts of the White House to tidy things up.

This country is always going to be suspicious of any government secret service agency, especially after Cuba, and it is likely to get all the more suspicious when the spooks see a great conspiracy in the reporting of their activities.

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